

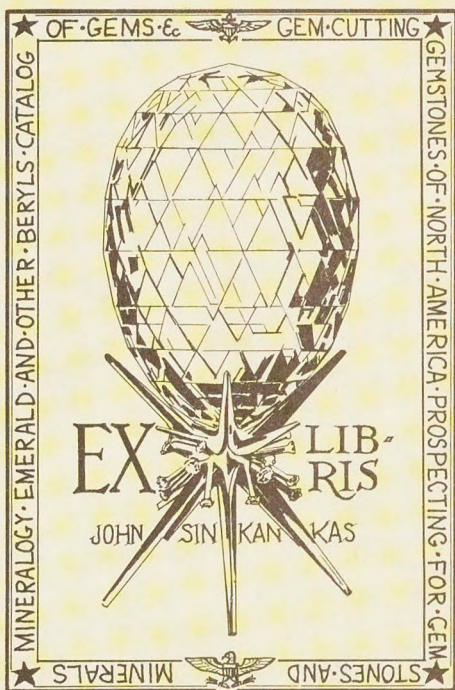
SHORT CHAPTER

ON

RINGS.

C. POOLEY, F.S.A.

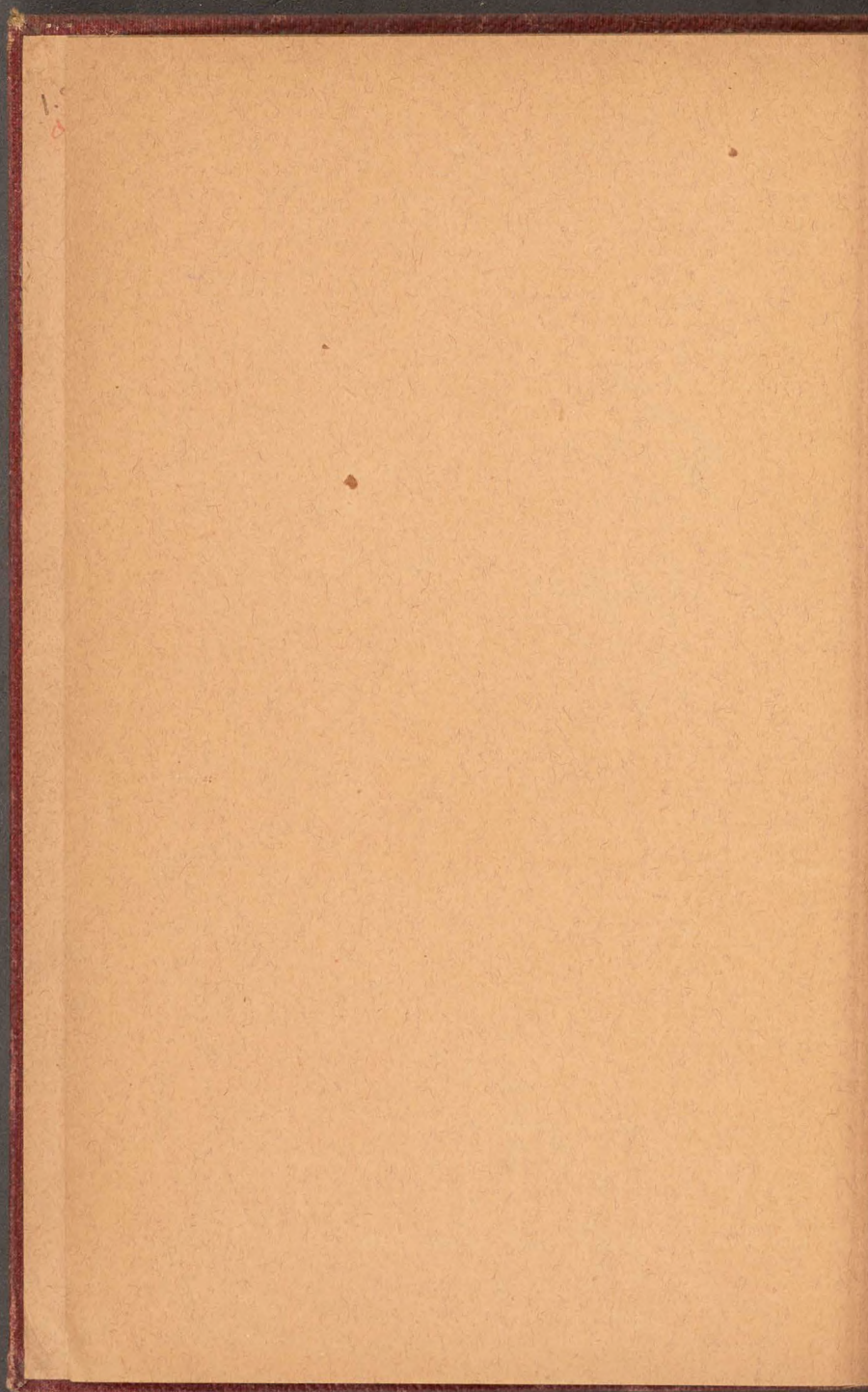
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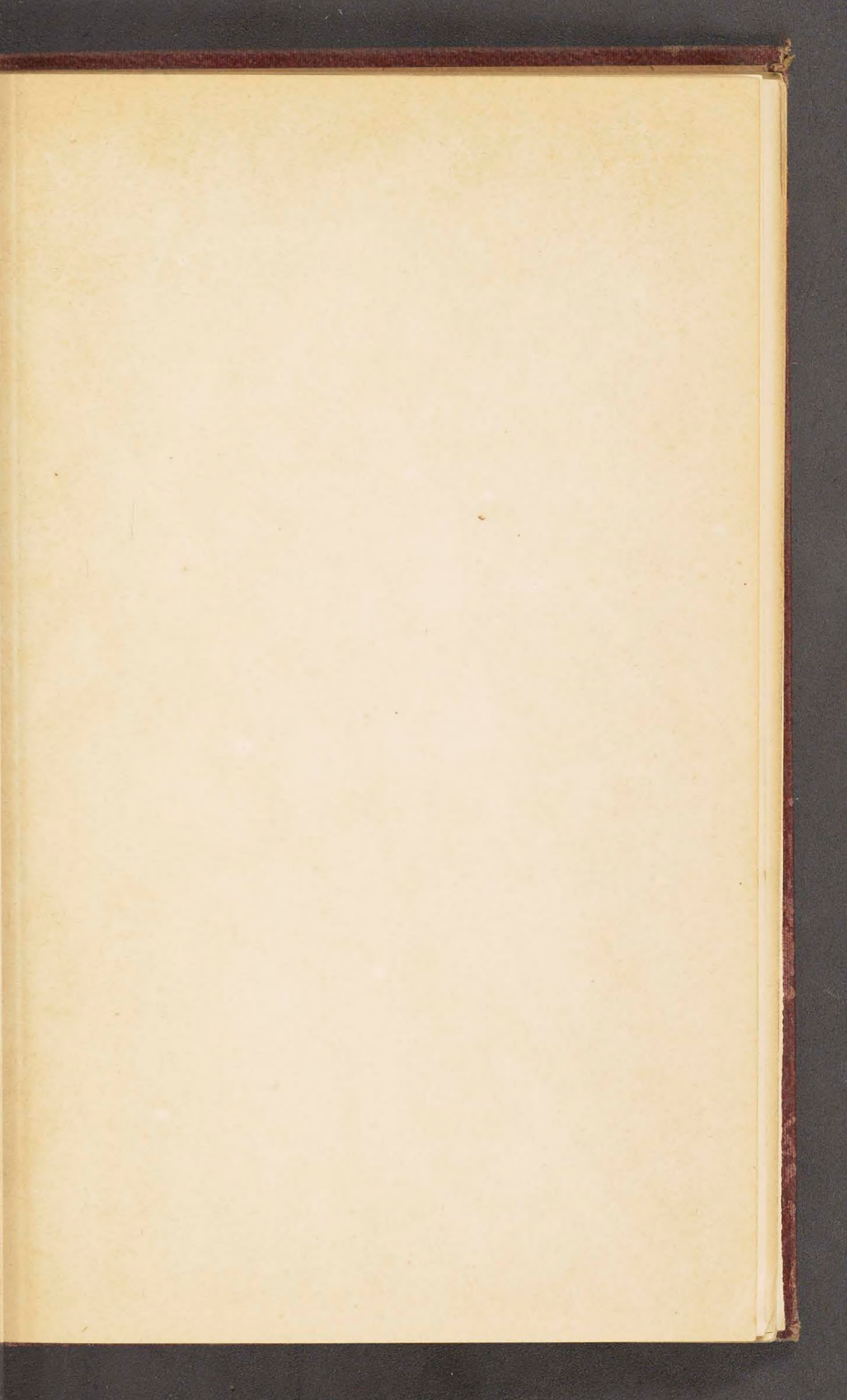


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A
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BY
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A SHORT CHAPTER ON RINGS.

IT is not my intention in these Notes to speak of finger-rings in general, since so vast is this subject that to enter upon it would be to travel far beyond the scope of this article, but only to touch briefly on some of those rings which have an historic interest or an antiquarian value.

Most persons are familiar with the great variety and beauty of the rings which are used to adorn the hands of both sexes.

So great is the love for these ornaments that hardly a nation, barbarous or civilized, is without them.

Not always worn on the fingers, however, but attached to different parts of the person.

Rings are of great antiquity, as we may learn from various passages in the Old and New Testament.

More than a thousand years before Christ, according to biblical cronology, rings were worn not only on the fingers but in the ears and nostrils.

Ear-Rings.

To illustrate this by examples, we learn in Exodus xxxii. that the Israelites, impatient at the delay of Moses in the Mount, Aaron ordered them to break off the golden ear-rings that were in the ears of their wives, of their sons, and of their daughters, and bring them unto him, which they did, out of which he made the golden calf. So also in Job, after the long period of his temptations and trials, God accepted him and endowed him with many riches, and every man amongst other things gave him an ear-ring of gold.

Another instance is mentioned in the Book of Judges, viii., v. 24.

Gideon, after the battle which ended in the discomfiture of the Midianites, made a request to the Ishmaelites that every man should give up the ear-rings of his prey; which accordingly they did, the weight thereof was one thousand seven hundred shekels* of gold. These references will suffice to show the general use, weight, and value of these particular ornaments.

* The weight of the Jewish shekel is about half-an-ounce : 1,700 shekels would weigh about 53½-lbs. (avordupoise) of gold.

Signet Rings.

Signet rings are mentioned in several parts of the Old Testament as symbols of respect and authority. They were sometimes wholly of metal, but frequently the inscription was borne on a stone set in silver or gold. One of the most notable instances of signet rings is that of Joseph, as narrated in Genesis xii., 24, in which Pharaoh took the signet off his own hand and placed it on that of Joseph, as an insignia of his exalted position and vice-regal power.

A second is the instance of Ahasuerus, in which he placed his own ring on the hand of Haman : that signet which had sealed the king's decree for the massacre of all Jews, men, women and children, throughout his dominion.

Again, in the deception of Tamar ; to whom Judah gave, with other presents, his signet ring.

The fourth is that of Darius, who sealed with his own signet the stone which he had commanded to be placed over the mouth of the den of lions in which Daniel was immured.

Betrothal Rings.

Perhaps of these rings the most remarkable is that commonly called the Mary ring, or the ring which Joseph is reputed to have given Mary on their espousals. It is stated to have been discovered by a jeweller at Jerusalem, A.D. 996, and is supposed to be of onyx or amethyst.

Tradition assigned to it miraculous efficacy in the cure of various diseases, and it is said to have possessed the faculty of multiplying itself. Since, many called Mary rings have been claimed by various churches in Europe.

The Mispah ring, as it is appropriately styled, is a flat band of gold with the word **Mispah** engraved on it. It is a betrothal ring, and commemorates the covenant made between Jacob and Laban:—"The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."

Wedding Rings.

The wedding ring is so well known, and so universally used by Christians ; and even as Hooker says, who cites Tartullian (referring to the subjects of the Greek and Roman Empires), that it seems almost superfluous to allude to it here.

There are, however, one or two points connected with the wedding ring not generally known, which may well deserve the attention of the reader.

In the English Church it plays such an important part in the marriage service that it cannot be dispensed with, as no marriage can be held valid unless celebrated in conformity with the ritual which prescribes its use.

In the Romish Church it is essential also, but not absolutely ; since the mutual consent of the two parties constitutes the marriage, as in fact it does in every marriage, whether ecclesiastical or civil.

The ring is made of gold, which is placed on the fourth finger of the left hand of the woman. On the left hand because it is the side of the heart,

which is the fountain of all love ; and on the fourth finger, not on account of a vein leading from the heart to that finger, as the old divines taught, but curiously enough, in the anatomical structure of this finger two distinct nerves are found to be distributed to it, one on each side, the radial and the ulnar, and thus the union of the two is embraced by the ring.

Whether this has been a fortuitous discovery I know not, since the origin of the choice of the fourth finger is lost in the dim vista of the past. The same distribution occurs in the fourth finger of the right hand, and is the same in both sexes, and in no other finger.

The ring is a token and pledge of the authority of the husband over the wife ; of her fidelity to him, and of their union and affection.

As the wife is subject to her husband, who is the head of the wife, in like manner as Christ is the Head of the Church.

There is no canon or decretal which decides the quality of the ring. It may be of gold, silver, brass, or even hair. But good taste and high appreciation of its sacred use, gives gold the preference.

The ring, however, is not made of pure gold, as poets love to sing. Were it so, it would be so soft and yielding that it would not only get out of shape, but would be in danger of injury.

In order, then, to render it firm and durable, a little silver, which being a precious metal, is added to it ; just enough to strengthen the gold without impairing its colour and brightness.

The combination of these two precious metals suggests the following explanation :—

Pure gold, wherever it is mentioned in Holy Scripture, is said to correspond to love ; and silver to wisdom.

And here we may mention that in the Roman Catholic Ritual the man places gold and silver on the book.

And so love and wisdom, the highest qualities of the soul, are represented by the ring and by the gold and silver. And these qualities, when spiritually discerned and conjoined in married partners, make an indissoluble one ; which then becomes a true marriage which can never be revoked.

Rings of Dignity.

THE CORONATION RING.—In this instance we have the high use to which a ring is applied, and the recognition of the purest symbolism as a part of the Ceremony of State.

The investiture of the English Sovereigns by the ring is an important part of our present Coronation Ceremonial.

On this occasion the Master of the Jewel House delivers the ring (which is of plain gold with a large table ruby on which the cross of St. George is engraved) to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who places it on the fourth finger of the Sovereign's *right* hand, as the *right* hand denotes strength, power, and dominion, saying, "Receive this ring and ensign of Kingly dignity, and of defence of the Catholic faith that as you are this day consecrated Head of the Kingdom, so rich in faith and abounding in good works, you may reign with him who is King of Kings, to Whom be glory and honour for ever and ever."

The ruby is here used to signify the Word of God in its fulness, by virtue of its colour, which may be compared to that of the flame of the sun. This spiritual meaning is said to obtain wherever the ruby is mentioned in Scripture.

THE POPE'S RING.—Nearly in all investitures a ring is presented to the elected candidate.

The Sovereign Pontiff for example receives a ring with a costly emerald in token of his marriage with the Church, and a second ring called the Fisherman's Ring, which is really the Pope's ring of investiture and is placed on his finger immediately after his election. On it is engraved St. Peter in a boat of ancient form, hence the name.

CARDINALS, on their creation, receive a ring in which is usually a sapphire. They wear them at all times, but lay them aside on Good Friday as a mark that the Church is in mourning for her spouse.

On the investiture of Bishops, also, a ring is presented to each by the Pope.

In the reception of Novices into the Roman Catholic Sisterhood, one of the ceremonies performed

was the presentation of a ring blessed by the Bishop ; usually of gold with a sapphire.

Some authorities state that why the sapphire is used in priestly rings is founded on the belief that the sapphire is a stone that has the power of cooling love.

Secondly, that its colour agrees with the vestments of the priestly order.

But a moment's reflection will show that these explanations are fanciful and trifling, and that a much higher signification is implied in the use of the sapphire.

For instance, when we read in Exodus xxiv., 10, "And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness" ; and in Exodus xxviii., 18, that the sapphire formed the second row of the precious stones in the breast plate of Aaron ; and in the vision of Ezekiel, i., 26, wherein he saw the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone ; also in Revelations xxi., 19, the sapphire was seen by St. John to form the second foundation of the City New Jerusalem ; we are

constrained to admit that there must exist a much higher significance to the use of the sapphire than is generally supposed.

It seems unquestionable that the Christian Church derived the use of precious stones from the early Mosaic or Jewish Church, which was well versed in the most ancient science of correspondence, by which things spiritual were represented by things natural, and by which divine science the Word of God is written.

Charm Rings.

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These rings were common amongst the Greeks and Romans.

It is alleged by the virtue of these rings tumours and various other diseases were cured by their immediate application and touch.

The onyx and amethyst are said to possess these miraculous powers, the same as in the Mary ring.

A ring with a small piece of loadstone in it is said to be an antidote to protect new-born children from the fairies.

The ring of Solomon is supposed to be of this class.

A Hebrew legend speaks of the magnificent splendour of this ring, and assigns to it the potential property of enabling him to baffle the most subtle of his enemies. It is supposed that it was engraved with the Tetragrammaton, or the four Hebrew letters signifying the awful and sacred name of Jehovah.

The Vernicle.

No precious stone has ever excited more reverent attention than the magnificent emerald which is supposed to have formed the bezel of a ring, and was stated to have been engraved with the portrait of our Saviour, by command of Tiberius Cæsar. It was taken from Constantinople by Sultan Bajazet II., and presented to Pope Innocent VIII. as a ransom for his brother, who was taken captive by the Christians at Bronsa, A.D. 1482.

This unique and inestimable gem with its Veronicon was long preserved in the Treasury of the Vatican, but at length has unhappily disappeared, and all traces of this priceless relic has been for ever lost to the whole Christian world, notwithstanding the most diligent search has been made for it.

The following is an instance of the singular use to which a ring was applied in the ceremony of the Doge of Venice marrying the Adriatic.

When the dissensions which had arisen between Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Alexander III. had in a measure subsided, the Emperor repaired to Venice and was reconciled to the Pope in the church of St. Mark.

The Doge Ziani by his sagacity, forbearance, and tact, acted the part of a wise mediator in these transactions.

It was then that the Pope, in token of gratitude, is said to have presented the Doge with a ring, saying : "Take this as a pledge of authority over the sea, and marry her every year, you and your successors for ever, in order that all may know that she is under your jurisdiction, and that I have placed her under your dominion as a wife under the dominion of her husband."

From that time the Doges annually wedded the Adriatic by throwing a ring into it, a ceremony which may appear to us absurd, but which was both impressive and important in those ages.

In the New Testament there are two instances of the mention of rings ; one in the parable of the

prodigal son, to whom, on his return, his father ordered a ring to be given. The second is to be found in the Epistle of St. James, wherein the Apostle rebukes the brethren for giving the highest place in the assembly to a man with a gold ring.



